CLAIMS

What is claimed is:

5   1.   A parking meter for monitoring an adjacent parking

space comprising:

a transmitter,

a unique identification code,

a vehicle presence detector for conveying occupancy

10   status of the adjacent parking space, the vehicle presence

detector being coupled to the transmitter,

a camera for acquiring at least one image of a license

plate of a vehicle parked in the adjacent parking space,

the camera being coupled to the transmitter,

15   wherein the transmitter can communicate the unique

identification code, the occupancy status, and the image to

a receiver.

2.   The parking meter according to claim 1, wherein the

20   transmitter can communicate via one or more of: Internet,

World Wide Web, intranet, extranet, virtual private

network, cellular network, telephone network, fiber optic

network, cable network, satellite network, and GPS link.

3.   The parking meter according to claim 1, comprising additionally a light source to illuminate the license plate when acquiring the image.

5   4.   The parking meter according to claim 1, comprising an authorization input device for producing an authorization request, the authorization input device being coupled to the transmitter, and wherein the transmitter can communicate the authorization request to the receiver.

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5.   The parking meter according to claim 4, wherein the authorization input device comprises at least one of a payment input and a user identity input.

15   6.   The parking meter according to claim 4, further comprising a meter controller coupled to the vehicle detector, the camera, the authorization input device, wherein the meter controller can selectively generate a parking violation signal as a function of the authorization 20   request, and the transmitter can communicate the parking violation signal.

7.   The parking meter according to claim 4, comprising a display output coupled to the authorization input device.

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8.   The parking meter according to claim 7, comprising a meter receiver coupled to the display.

5   9.   The parking meter according to claim 4, comprising a parking meter body encased in a sheet of titanium.

10.   A system for parking enforcement comprising:

10   a plurality of parking meters, each parking meter comprising

    a transmitter,

    a unique identification code,

    a vehicle presence detector for conveying

15   occupancy status of an adjacent parking space, the vehicle presence detector being coupled to the transmitter,

    a camera for acquiring at least one image of a license plate of a vehicle parked in the adjacent

20   parking space, the camera being coupled to the transmitter,

    wherein the transmitter can communicate the corresponding unique identification code, the occupancy status, and the image;

at least one receiver for communicating with the

transmitter,

a database comprising

the plurality of unique identification codes,

5   a parking meter location associated with each

unique identification code, and

a parking permission type associated with each

unique identification code,

a timer to measure a duration of occupancy,

10   a controller coupled to the database, the receiver,

and the timer, the controller selectively generating a

parking violation signal as a function of the corresponding

occupancy status, permission type, and duration of

occupancy, and

15   a mail distribution center that receives from the

controller the parking violation signal, the corresponding

parking meter location, and the image.

11. The system according to claim 10 wherein the mail

20 distribution center responds to the parking violation

signals by least one of dispatching tow trucks to the

parking meter location and sending parking tickets to

owners of vehicles.

12. The system according to claim 10 wherein at least a subset of the plurality of parking meters each additionally comprises an authorization input device for producing an authorization request, the authorization input device being coupled to the transmitter, wherein the transmitter can communicate the authorization request to the receiver, and the controller generating the parking violation signal additionally as a function of the corresponding authorization request.

13. The system according to claim 12 wherein the authorization input device is a payment input.

14. The system according to claim 12 comprising a database of parking user accounts coupled to the controller, each user account having an associated user identity code and user account information, wherein the authorization input device is a user identity input for entering the user identity code, the controller generating the parking violation signal additionally as a function of user account information, and the controller being capable of updating the user account information.

15. The system according to claim 12, comprising at least
one controller transmitter and wherein at least a subset of
the plurality of meters have meter receivers for
communicating with the controller transmitter, and output
5   displays coupled to the meter receivers.

16. The system according to claim 15, further comprising a
database of critical Amber Alert details coupled to the
controller, whereby the critical Amber Alert details can be
10   sown on the output displays.

17. The system according to claim 14, wherein the image is
a digital image, the license plate number is extracted from
the digital image, and the controller generates the parking
15   violation signal additionally as a function of the
extracted license plate number.

18. The system according to claim 10, wherein the image is
a digital image and the license plate number is extracted
20   from the digital image, the system comprising a list of one
or more sought license plate numbers coupled to the
controller, and wherein the controller compares extracted
license plate numbers to each sought license plate number
to generate a sought license plate matching signal, and the

mail distribution system receives the sought license plate matching signal.

19. A method for parking enforcement comprising:

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obtaining a vehicle presence indication when a vehicle is parked in a monitored parking space,

obtaining an image of a license plate of the vehicle,

communicating the vehicle presence indication and the

10 license plate image to a controller,

selectively generating by the controller a parking

violation signal as a function of parking meter location

and duration of occupancy, and

communicating the parking violation signal to a mail

15 distribution center.

20. The method according to claim 19 further comprising

obtaining a parking user authorization request

20 communicating the authorization request to the controller,

and

selectively generating by the controller a parking

violation signal as a function additionally of the

authorization request signal.

21.   The method according to claim 20 further comprising

encrypting the authorization request after obtaining the

5   authorization request, and

decrypting the authorization request after communicating

the authorization request.

22.   The method according to claim 20 wherein the

10   authorization request signal comprises a parking user

identification code, the method comprising

accessing by the controller a database of parking user

accounts comprising parking user identification codes

associated with parking user account information, and

15   selectively generating by the controller a parking

violation signal as a function additionally of the parking

user account information.

23.   The method according to claim 22 comprising

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measuring parking duration,

transmitting the parking duration and the parking user

identification code to the database of parking user

accounts, and

updating the account information associated to the parking

user identification code.

24.   The method according to claim 19 comprising

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digitizing the image,

extracting a license plate number from the image,

comparing the extracted license plate number to one or more

sought license plate number,

10   generating a sought license plate matching signal when the

extracted license plate number matches the sought license

plate number,

communicating the sought license plate matching signal to

the mail distribution center.

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25.   The method according to claim 24, wherein the sought

license plate number is a critical Amber Alert detail.